

# KANSAS

Kansas State Historical Society  
Cultural Resources Division

KATHLEEN SEBELIUS, GOVERNOR

## CERTIFICATION OF STATE REGISTER LISTING

The Register of Historic Kansas Places includes all Kansas properties nominated to the National Register as well as lower threshold properties which are listed on the state register only.

Property Name: South Fork Spillman Creek Bridge

Address: Cedron Township, Lincoln County, KS

Legal: NW4, SW4, SW4, NW4, S36-T10S-R10W, Cedron Township

County: Lincoln

Owner: Sylvan Grove Historical Society

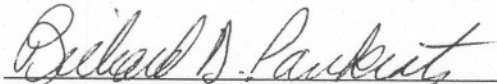
Address: c/o Vera Meyer, Sylvan Grove, KS 67481

National Register eligible \_\_\_\_\_

State Register eligible   X  

This property was approved by the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review for the Register of Historic Kansas Places on August 21, 2004.

I hereby certify that this property is listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places.

  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

8/23/04  
Date

9/95

## **Spillman Creek Bridge Lincoln County, Kansas**

### **Description**

The South Fork Spillman Creek Double Arch Bridge (c.1908), which spans the South Fork of Spillman Creek, is located between sections 35 and 36 in southeast Cedron Township in Lincoln County. The bridge, which angles across the stream in a northwest/southeast orientation, is seventy-five feet long and twenty feet wide. Its two arches vary in diameter in accordance with the original specifications provided by the Lincoln County commissioners; the north arch is twenty-four feet in diameter and the south arch is twenty feet in diameter.

The abutments, voussoirs, spandrels, and pier are constructed of post rock limestone; the pier stands on an impost of concrete.

In 1951, the bridge's original stone banisters were removed and a concrete deck, which increased the road surface width to twenty-four feet, was laid across the bridge.

### **Statement of Significance**

The South Fork Spillman Creek Double Arch Bridge (c. 1908) is historically significant under Criterion A for its association with the development of transportation in Lincoln County, Kansas. The bridge is also significant under Criterion C as an example of post rock construction, and is to be included in the "Masonry Arch Bridges of Kansas" thematic resources nomination.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the construction and maintenance of roads was a local responsibility. Because most Kansans seldom traveled more than ten miles to market, the local roads reflected this. Most roads extended fewer than twenty miles, and their courses were determined by local need. Before bridges were built, creek crossings were dependent upon low water and cooperative horses. As Larry Jochims noted, "As the market economy increased in the state, so did the need for all-weather crossings of streams and rivers. Large numbers of small communities were competing for survival. Bridges that allowed farmers easy access to markets could make the difference between growth and stagnation."

#### Historical background and significance:

The South Fork Spillman Creek Double Arch Bridge was built on a crossing that is reputed to have been in use for perhaps thousands of years. Following the buffalo on their migration, the Pawnee crossed Spillman Creek. Elizabeth N. Barr wrote that "The famous Pawnee road which extended from Nebraska to the Big Bend of the Arkansas, thence wherever opportunity afforded, came through what is now Lincoln County and crossed the Spillman five or six miles above its mouth."

The road that passed over the Spillman Creek Bridge followed a north-south section line and provided a nearly straight shot nine miles south to Sylvan Grove, a prosperous small community which had been blessed with a Union Pacific rail line in 1887. By the early 1900s, Sylvan Grove

had accumulated a bank, churches, a cafe, and a number of businesses. The Spillman Creek Bridge allowed farmers who lived north of the creek to reliably access the amenities of Sylvan Grove—including the elevator which bought their crops and the railroad which took those crops to larger markets. In 1916, an additional railroad line was run six miles north of the Spillman Creek Bridge. This event convinced the citizens of the nearby communities of Hunter and Victor to combine their towns at the point intersected by the railroad line and the road going north from the Spillman Creek Bridge.

On August 11, 1908, the Lincoln county commissioners awarded J. E. Beverly the contract to build the South Fork Spillman Creek Double Arch Bridge at a cost of seventeen dollars per cord. During the period in which the Spillman Creek Bridge was constructed, the Lincoln county commissioners entertained and approved a large number of petitions for the improvement of roads and the erection of bridges. That there is little historic documentation about the construction of this specific bridge is probably a by-product of the flurry of road improvement projects going on at that time, and is indicative of the then still commonplace nature of stone arch bridge construction. Stone arch bridges were popular in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Kansas, particularly in areas such as Lincoln County, where limestone was an important and readily available building material. Although stone bridges were initially more expensive to build than were metal bridges, Walter Sharp, a prolific stone arch bridge contractor in Kansas, had this to say about the durability and cost effectiveness of stone arch bridges: "The rubble stone bridge looks solid, substantial, and rustic; more like the handiwork of nature than of man...The item of repairing and renewing floors of steel and wooden bridges is constantly increasing with each succeeding year, a fruitful source of annoyance and expense to the people. The money thus expended amounts in many instances to enough to build good arch bridges in each county each season, which latter bridges have no wooden floors to wear out, need no repairs and are impervious to the action of the elements. Moreover, they are built by local labor out of native materials, which is no small item to the taxpayer who foots the bills."

Post rock limestone played a fundamental role in north-central Kansas' settlement and economy. The lack of timber discovered by early settlers to the area was offset by the abundance of post rock, or fencepost, limestone. This chalky limestone, formed 60 million to 130 million years ago during the Cretaceous age, exhibits the useful quality of being soft enough to be shaped with hand tools when first quarried, but hardening significantly after exposure to the elements. Rather than importing expensive lumber, the citizens of Lincoln County made widespread use of this valuable resource in building their homes, fencing their fields—giving rise to the stone's common name—and erecting bridges to cross the many streams that meander across the county. The Spillman Creek Bridge exemplifies this practice; the stone was quarried from the hills one-half mile southwest of the bridge's location under J.E. Beverly's supervision. In 1989, the Kansas legislature designated Lincoln County as the Post Rock Capital of Kansas.

In 1945, as a result of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1944, the Kansas legislature laid out a 20,000 mile system of secondary roads, levied a gasoline tax for use in building and maintaining Kansas' road systems, and created the Secondary Roads Department as a division of the state highway commission. This department served as a liaison between the federal Bureau of Public Roads and the counties, and assisted counties in preparing plans and contracting for secondary highway projects, thus shifting some of the traditional responsibility for road maintenance from



local authorities to state and federal governments. In 1950, the state highway commission, which had already developed Kansas highways 14 and 18 through Lincoln County, expressed an interest in developing the road which crossed the South Fork Spillman Creek Double Arch Bridge as an additional state highway. An article in the October 26, 1950, issue of *The Lincoln Sentinel-Republican* reported that the road had been graded and was ready to be surfaced. To meet the state's standards for weight-carrying capacity, at least one bridge along this route was replaced with a concrete structure; the Spillman Creek Bridge's original banisters were removed and a concrete deck was installed. The road, which became Highway 181, was resurfaced with asphalt. The curves in the road created by the bridge's placement, however, forced cars to slow to a speed of thirty miles per hour to cross the bridge safely. By 1992, this factor, coupled with the bridge's level of disrepair, prompted the State Highway Department to abandon the bridge. Although the highway department's initial intention was to demolish the Spillman Creek Bridge, the efforts of the Sylvan Grove Historical Society instead led the highway department to turn over to the historical society the bridge and 1.3 acres adjoining it. The Sylvan Grove Historical Society received a grant to complete the repairs necessary for stabilizing the bridge.

### **Bibliography**

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